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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 000236

SIPDIS

CAIRO FOR POL -- MAXSTADT
LONDON FOR GURNEY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/04/2013
TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV MOPS PINS NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NAVY MINISTER: NOTHING WILL HAPPEN ON
BENUE

REF: A. ABUJA 205
B. ABUJA 228

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER; REASONS 1.5 (B)
AND (D).

¶1. (C) During a January 23 conversation with Ambassador Jeter, Minister of State for Defense (Navy) Chris Agbobo commented on the October 2001 Benue massacre. Agbobo did not expect anyone to be held accountable. Agbobo said while "everyone knows what happened (at Benue)" nothing would come of the government's investigation.

¶2. (C) Agbobo remarked that defeated PDP presidential aspirant and Benue native Barnabas Gemade's unsuccessful attempt to use the Benue incident to weaken Obasanjo during the PDP convention proved that the people of Benue did not blame the government for the killings. According to Agbobo, most people realized that the massacre would not have happened if "criminals" had not killed and mutilated 19 soldiers. Implying that he thought the attack on Zaki Biam had been authorized by someone within the senior levels of the military or government, Agbobo said the military acted correctly and that the Army would have reacted even more forcefully if the decision had been his.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Agbobo became the naval Minister of State only last month and was at the Ministry of Agriculture when the massacre happened. In that position, he was well known to the Ambassador, and following his appointment to the MOD called on the Ambassador at the Embassy on January 23.

¶4. (C) Agbobo's implication that the attack on Zaki Biam was authorized at a level significantly higher than that of those in immediate command of the offending soldiers is troubling; however, Agbobo is neither a military insider, nor was he at the MOD at the time of the Benue incident. He appears to be giving us his opinion more than anything else. His belief that the GON will never hold anyone accountable for Benue may also be his personal view but it is one shared by many Nigerians. END COMMENT.

JETER